

Recommendation 6A: English 20 and Critical Thinking

Recommendation Summary¹

1. The recommendation proposes that if English 20 is maintained (in whatever form), it should be absorbed into the GE Program
2. The recommendation details three options for English 20—with A being recommended:
 - A. Combine the current second-semester writing requirement (English 20) with the critical thinking requirement (Area A3)
 - B. Eliminate the second-semester writing requirement
 - C. Retain the second-semester writing requirement, raising the lower division GE Program to 42 units

GERT Rationale Summary*

- There was unanimous agreement that if the requirement remains it should be part of the GE Program—not a separate “graduation requirement”—because of the confusion this distinction causes students and because the requirement was intended as part of students’ general education.
- Concern was raised about the resources required to maintain English 20 as a stand-alone requirement—originally intended to require 3 FTE, last year it required 8.4.
- Students often take this course as upper division students rather than as sophomores as the course was intended.
- Community colleges already articulate an English critical thinking course (English 1C) to meet both the critical thinking and English 20 requirement, and the committee believes both the writing and critical thinking needs of students can be satisfied in one course.
- Anticipated problems:
 - o sequencing of courses—how to keep students from taking both English 1A and the lower division critical thinking/English 20 combined course at the same time
 - o community college articulation issues related to critical thinking and a critical thinking/English 20 combined course

Background Information

The current critical thinking requirement was established by Title 5 and EO 595, which require that all CSU campuses offer “a minimum of 9 units in communication in the English language, to include both oral communication and written communication, and in critical thinking, to include consideration of common fallacies in reasoning.”

The current English 20 requirement was designed and implemented in 1991. The Faculty Senate, in response to heightened faculty concern about the nature and quality of student writing on campus, proposed a mandatory second semester of writing instruction to be undertaken at the sophomore level. This requirement was designed to build on the instruction provided in the freshman course and continue students’ focus on writing as they worked their way through lower

¹ The complete text of the GERT recommendation and rationale can be found at the end of this document.

and upper division requirements. The Faculty Senate noted, “All students, including students who have completed the IGETC shall be required to complete a second semester composition course with a C- grade or better.” Thus, the intent was that this was a requirement to be adopted in addition to all other general education requirements.

Because the majority of our students transfer in at the upper-division level, it became important for students to be able to fulfill this requirement at the community college prior to transfer. In articulation discussions, the community colleges were unwilling to design and implement a course which was not a CSU system-wide requirement. If no course was available to community college students, all CSUS students would have to take the class on our campus. The campus was unwilling to offer the substantial sections necessary for every student to meet the requirement on campus. Therefore, when the community colleges declined to offer the new course and when faced with the reality of offering English 20 at CSUS to every student (including transfers), it became expedient to find as close a suitable alternative as possible so that community college students could meet this requirement prior to transfer. The articulation committee decided that substantial writing instruction and working with multiple texts were touched on in English 1B-Writing about Literature and English 1C-Critical Thinking. (It is also important to note that critical thinking courses outside of the English department were not articulated as the necessary writing instruction component was not included.) The committee decided to articulate these courses as meeting the English 20 requirement but noted that they did not consider the courses “equivalent”—meaning a grade in one would not replace a grade in the other because the course materials were substantially different. Furthermore, because English 1C already met the articulation agreements for Area A3 (the GE critical thinking requirement), this course essentially “double counted” for students—allowing them to meet both the sophomore-level writing and critical thinking requirements. Thus, the articulation was more a decision of expediency than philosophical agreement. It is, in great part, this articulation agreement which drives the recommendation.

Implementation of moving requirement into GE Program

Within the GERT report there seems to be little debate about the proposal to move current “graduation requirements” into the official GE Program. It seems clear that the English 20 writing requirement was established as part of student general education goals. Retaining requirements extraneous to the GE Program serves only to confuse students about the number of actual requirements in addition to their major course of study. Whatever the nature of the course, the GE Program needs to draft a clear policy statement that describes the requirement as a part of lower division General Education. Once within the program, new or existing courses could be “certified” by the appropriate GE Area as each comes up for review according to established criteria/standards.

Less clear than the move into GE is the effect of this move on previous and later writing requirements. If the course is designed to be a sophomore-level writing course, the GE Program must keep students from taking the requirement concurrently with their freshman writing courses. Thus, the GE Program will need to establish a prerequisite for the requirement (a C- or better in English 1A or an equivalent course). The GE Program will also need to determine if the course should become a prerequisite for future writing requirements or writing intensive courses. The rationale suggests that the intent of the course is to be a sophomore requirement, thus a

prerequisite for later, upper division requirements. Enforcement of this prerequisite would address the GERT-identified problem of students postponing enrollment until they are upperclassmen. Implementing the course as a prerequisite, however, could impede student progress toward graduation and might require an initial, expanded offering of the course(s) to address the immediate needs of the students.

Implementation of a combined course

The GERT recommendation proposes that each student satisfy the second semester writing and critical thinking requirements through a combined course. Once implemented, a grade of C- or better would satisfy these two requirements.

Course Development

The combined writing/critical thinking course could be developed by departments in one of three ways:

- 1) Departments could identify a course that already meets the second semester writing requirements and integrate sufficient instruction in critical thinking to meet the requirement.
- 2) Departments could identify a course that already meets the critical thinking requirements and integrate sufficient instruction in writing to meet the requirement.
- 3) Departments could develop entirely new courses which meet the requirements of the newly combined requirement.

Time Line

The new requirement must be formally documented in the CSUS catalog, so the following time-line establishes a procedure to implement the requirement for the next feasible catalog—2006-2008. Assuming that the text for the 2006 catalog must be in by the end of Fall 2005, departments must generate these combined courses in the coming year, Fall 2003-Spring 2004. Ideally, the University Writing Coordinator will be hired and available to assist in this design phase, helping to integrate specific course details and design assessment strategies. If this position is not filled, the university will need to support substantial assigned time for a writing-knowledge faculty member to assist in this process. In the following year, Fall 2004-Spring 2005, new course proposals could be considered and approved for implementation by the appropriate GE committee. During this academic year, the appropriate GE committee also needs to consider prerequisites for the course (completion of English 1A or an equivalent course with a C- or better) and whether or not the combined course should be a prerequisite for future writing requirements (WPE, Advanced Study, etc.). This will allow for complete implementation of the requirement beginning Fall 2006 to coincide with the release of the new catalog.

Requirements for a combined course

For programmatic consistency, all combined writing/critical thinking courses should have certain common requirements. For these courses to be successful, several important considerations must be met.